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**Where knowledge meets: Heritage expertise at the intersection of people,
perspective and place**

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Abstract

This paper explores meetings as spaces for the alignment of various forms of expert knowledge. Drawing on ethnographic research at Historic Scotland, the national heritage agency, it examines two forms of meeting in which experts come together. Building on recent work on the materiality of knowledge, these meetings are explored as a series of situated articulations that entail the complex and simultaneous negotiation of various forms of epistemic, social and material context. These ethnographic specificities are used to develop two linked points. Firstly, it is suggested that the lens of ‘meeting’ complicates the relatively monolithic characterisations of heritage expertise that attend widely influential formulations of an Authorised Heritage Discourse. Secondly it is argued that heritage practitioners’ own accounts of these negotiations highlight material and spatial dimensions of bureaucratic conduct that have received relatively little ethnographic attention in prevalent textually oriented accounts.

Introduction: Where knowledge meets

Recent work on heritage has given relatively little attention to the institutional practices through which the past is materially and institutionally produced. Brumann notes that ‘In comparison to what we know about the carriers and consumers of heritage, we are much less informed about heritage institutions and their personnel.’ (Brumann, 2014: 17). He

suggests various reasons for this, including methodological issues of institutional access, and a tendency for critical scholarship to reduce the practices and ideologies of elite professionals to an assumed imperative of elite interest (cf. Jones and Yarrow, 2013). Since the 1980s, the critical deconstruction has developed from a once radical critique, to an approach that now has a near hegemonic hold on interdisciplinary accounts of heritage practice. These accounts participate in currents of thinking, that as Brown has recently highlighted, characterise a broader analytic and methodological orientation: ‘anthropologists are less inclined to treat bureaucracy as an object of study in its own right than as a backdrop for meditations on the ‘injustices of social stratification.’ (Brown, 2010: 741). Anthropologists have more prevalently engaged in morally inflected critiques of bureaucratic conduct, than in situated ethnographic accounts of the commitments that give rise to them. Thus in studies of heritage, as in anthropological approaches to bureaucracy more generally, important ethnographic complexities have been missed, firstly because institutionally authored texts – for example policy statements, guidelines, charters – have been taken as proxies for the institutional practices that produced them; and secondly because analysis of these has often been underpinned by a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ (Jackson, 2012, after Ricoer) that deflects attention from actors’ own accounts of the worlds they inhabit. Foucauldian inspired analyses of heritage have produced valuable insights about the politics of knowledge, but have often involved a politically reductionist interpretation (Mosse, 2005, Yarrow, 2011) that elides consideration of other elements of this practice.

Influenced by recent efforts to move beyond these deconstructive analytic frameworks (Brumann, 2014, Brumann, 2012, Macdonald, 2009, Jones and Yarrow, 2013, Yarrow and Jones, 2014), this paper focuses on meetings as central but under-investigated elements of heritage practice. While meetings are implicated in various forms of textual production, I suggest that these entail distinct forms of sociality that afford a position from which to

reconsider textually focused accounts of conservation practices. My account draws on ethnography undertaken in Historic Scotland, the national heritage agency. In this context, conservation is imagined as a complex endeavour in which the broad aim of preserving nationally significant elements of the past involves coordination of diverse forms of expertise, including from architects, archaeologists, scientists, historians and career civil servants. While in one sense regarded as ‘complementary’ forms of knowledge these engender personal and professional differences that can be inimicable to the desire for an ‘agency view’ characterised by consistency of approach across time and space.

Through a focus on meetings as central elements of institutional practice, I highlight how these are constituted as a situated interplay between difference and similarity, in which epistemic, personal and institutional issues are simultaneously and complexly at play. My account builds on earlier accounts of meeting, in particular Schwartzman’s (1989) attention to the quotidian practices through which these operate. However, while her theorisation of these instructively highlights how familiar institutional forms order various contexts beyond themselves, the focus on these as ‘communicative events’ elides key dimensions of the meetings at the heart of this paper. Seeking to highlight the material and spatial dimensions of these meetings as integrally constitutive of social relations and epistemic forms, I take inspiration from recent accounts which have variously questioned a material/social distinction as an adequate analytic basis for understanding organisational knowledge (Bruun-Jensen and Winthereik, 2013, Hull, 2012, Mol, 2002, Yarrow, 2011). Rather than understand expertise to inhere in abstract propositional claims or universalising discourses, my account thus examines institutional knowledge as this unfolds through a series of pragmatic articulations that include situated relationships between people, places, tools and documents. Work influenced by actor-network-theory provides a useful point of analytic departure to the extent it questions widespread assumptions about the social origin of action and meaning (Latour,

1993, Law, 1994). However rather than assume these qualities are necessarily distributed through networks of people and things, my own account is oriented by the more ethnographic question of how networks are conceptually and pragmatically 'cut' (Strathern, 1996). From this perspective the paper explores the conceptual distinctions at play in heritage experts' own understandings of meetings, focusing on ideas about historic buildings as active participants in the process of negotiating and aligning perspective.

Conservation and Consistency

At Historic Scotland, the importance and ubiquity of 'meeting' relates to the central importance placed on the consistent realisation of a collective 'agency approach'. Dara, a heritage manager with a degree in archaeology and architecture, is responsible for the protection of buildings of designated historic significance via various forms of 'listing'. During an interview, he acknowledges his own 'personal' interest in buildings even as he highlights the need to suspend this:

There is a conservation value in itself in doing something consistently and impartially because there's that kind of idea that you need a system that is trusted and is considered to be a good system for decision making about the historic environment and so the consistency feeds into that and consistency and impartiality is, I suppose, pretty important to the protection of buildings.'

The ethical attributes of the 'good' bureaucrat are thus articulated as a commitment to shared institutional procedures, aims and professional dispositions, even to the extent this requires the suspension of other more 'personal' dispositions and interests (DuGay, 2000). As

civil servants, employees commitments to conservation of the past are grounded by national policy and legislation that itself responds to conservation approaches set out in a series of international charters. In broad terms these are underpinned by the aim of support the preservation of the past, in its authentic form, through an approach grounded in 1) 'minimal intervention' to existing historic fabric, 2) conservation in the condition 'as found', and 3) the use of 'evidence-based' approaches to understanding and ameliorating threats. As enacted in national policy and guidance (much of which Historic Scotland has helped to formulate), these provide the framing criteria for a consistent approach.

Existing at a level of abstraction that is necessary consistent with the policy imperative of universal applicability, complexities, ambiguities and differences of opinion inevitably arise as these are related to specific contexts and cases. In the quotidian practices of the organisation, consistency emerges less as a determining principle than as a regulatory ideal. Never entirely achieved, it is always to some extent emergent in interactions, involving different parts of the agency, and specific social and material contexts beyond this. Across different parts of the agency, particularly in relation to the Conservation and Heritage Management division, much of the work of conservation inheres in the complexities, tensions and ambiguities that arise in this shift of scale. John, a heritage manager with an archaeological training, articulates this broader point in relation to his own work which he describes as 'mediating between legislation and policy and the needs of any given applicant'.

In addition to forms of indeterminacy arising from shifts in scale (between 'policy' and 'practice'), are those relating to the distinct interests and approaches relating to different forms of expertise. Heritage managers have training in architectural and archaeological backgrounds that are acknowledged to be associated with distinct, sometimes conflicting orientations to the importance of form and fabric as respective arbiters of authenticity and

significance (Jones and Yarrow, 2013). Even amongst colleagues with similar training, different specialisms and personal perspectives lead to more or less divergent assessments. Heritage managers routinely acknowledge this in an often recounted joke: in a meeting of ten, there will be eleven opinions on any given issue!

The complex nature of the historic environment is understood to account for the need for diverse forms of expertise. Institutional discourses of inter-disciplinarity routinely present these as complementary parts of a coherent whole, for example in the frequently invoked metaphor of experts as pieces in a jigsaw. James expresses the importance of consistent and collective decision making as part of a broader civil service orientation: ‘When we speak, when I speak, [if] I’m responding to people regarding a planning case, it’s not just me. It’s my face, my words, but it’s Historic Scotland that’s speaking...So you’ve got however many people’s knowledge that you can tap into and discuss things with...We’ve all got to deal with the same environment that we work with, so we’d all sit to discuss it. Is that a good approach? Is that a reasonable way of applying policy in these terms?’

At the intersection between a regulatory ideal of consistency, and one that celebrates inter-disciplinary collaboration, meetings emerge as key institutional contexts in which epistemic differences are expressed, negotiated and aligned. In an institutional context in which, to paraphrase Mol (2002) there is always ‘more than one’ perspective on what should happen, the imperative of consistency requires that these must always be resolved as outcomes and agreements through which difference is aligned as ‘less than many’. The subsequent ethnographic sections of this paper demonstrate how meetings accomplish this in a range of ways that entail situated articulations between people, places, tools, artefacts and buildings. In order to highlight the emergent qualities of these interactions, my account unfolds through two extended ethnographic vignettes. Through these, I aim to demonstrate how, from the perspective of those involved the achievement of consistency emerges through

meetings, that involves the complex and simultaneous negotiation of various forms of epistemic, social and material context.

Site Meeting

Ian, a District Architect, echoes others at Historic Scotland when he stresses the importance of site meetings: 'No matter how much documentation you put in front of someone, it's a bit like reading a book about Venice without actually experiencing the place ...it's a different thing. But when you're all looking at the problem right then, you with me, that's it.' Resonating with broader institutional discourses, he stresses the 'practical' nature of these interactions as key to the resolution that results: 'we all have post graduate degrees...[but] at the end of the day it all comes down to pragmatic decisions on site.' Abstract differences of role and of expertise must be aligned through site specific resolutions. From the perspective of those involved, the epistemic meeting of disciplinary and institutional difference, emerges through a physical meeting with specific buildings and sites. As Ian makes explicit, perspectives are changed when experts are moved from office to site. The building acts to extend and relate the perspectives that are brought to bear on it.

Some of these dynamics are evident during a site visit to Dunkeld Abbey, undertaken as part of the Annual Monument Audit (AMA), a yearly assessment of the condition of the properties Historic Scotland cares for, and a chance to plan future conservation strategies and interventions. The Abbey, mostly Norman and Gothic, is set amongst trees, with manicured lawns sloping down to the nearby river Tay. The front part is roofed and is still in use. The back is un-roofed with stone severely eroding. It presents an image of the 'romantic ruin' that appears timeless but its' materially and structurally precarious state raise a series of conservation issues that are a central focus of the meeting. The question of what to do is

complex and unresolved for two main reasons: it is not only that a range of possible actions are consistent with the conservation principles and philosophies that frame their engagements, but also that differences of role and training situate these issues in specific ways.

As at other AMAs, the meeting is overseen by the District Architect, the person with responsibility for planning and overseeing conservation work. Originally from the West of Scotland, Karen has a background in commercial architecture and while she stresses the importance of conservation principles, characterises her own approach as that of a 'pragmatist'. Karen's counterpart in the Heritage Management team is Oliver. An archaeologist by training, his role is to ensure that conservation interventions are consistent with the agency's regulations and approach, both through informal guidance and through overseeing a formal consent process. Also present at the meeting, is Stuart, whose role as the regional head of the Works team is to oversee and direct the squads who undertake the practical work of conservation. Nicki, the cultural resource expert, has a degree in history, and brings to the meeting a detailed knowledge of the cultural and historic significance of the site.

Dressed in hard hats and flash jackets, we climb to the top of the scaffolding. The meeting takes the form of a walking tour, following the sequence of illustrated issues laid out in the document produced by Karen. The point, as both Karen and Oliver make explicit, is to establish 'principles' and a 'methodology', as the basis for an approach that will inform a later, formally documented application for the work to be undertaken. Karen has planned the meeting as a tour of the building, with particular elements selected to highlight broader issues and to agree on an approach that is acceptable to all. Oliver explains the consent process she will need to follow: 'So you need an example photograph: what's going to happen and why'. Conversation is partly framed by an understanding of these documentary expectations. While

various forms of documentation structure these interactions, the outcomes agreed are not determined by them.

The first example relates to the wallhead, 'rough racked' stone, where the existing asphalt covering is brittle and cracking. Karen outlines the problem of erosion where the covering has eroded back from the stones. Her preferred approach is replacement of the original. Oliver wonders whether it might be possible to use Sana, a product that looks like lead, but which is cheaper and can be less damaging to existing fabric. There is discussion between Karen and Oliver about the potential of using this. No consensus is reached, beyond the conclusion that more research needs to be done. Karen notes this as a future 'action' she will need to initiate. We walk along the scaffolding to the next example. Karen holds up her annotated diagram to the stone. Eyes move between the two. Stuart is brought into the discussion by Karen: 'What do you think as a mason Stuart?' Stuart feels the stone, knocks it and picks at some loose material: 'I'd just leave that, that's pretty sound'. Karen's role is to choreograph the perspectives of others, drawing out different views, and opinions, seeking to ascertain where these depart and where they coincide. Different perspectives are not just abstractly held but materially performed. As embodiments of different kinds of 'skilled vision' (Grasseni, 2007), different ways of seeing are practically enacted, as different ways of interacting with the building. These unfold not only as abstractly held 'perspectives' but as emergent qualities of interactions, through which bodies, tools and documents are assembled in different ways. The meeting constitutes a specific 'ecology of attention' (Grasseni, 2007), in which perspectives align and bifurcate through situated encounters with the building. Conversation emerges at the intersection of these perspectives, sometimes in consensus and agreement, sometimes in conflict. At times the conversation seems to move seamlessly as perspectives build as a consensus. At other times disagreements are evident in forcefully raised voices or silent stalemates. The choreography of the meeting is intended to ensure that

even where perspectives diverge, they do so in relation to an object that is shared: experts congregate, eyes focused, drawn together by pointing hands, and by the graphical representations that Karen has made: diagrams, as stripped back versions of an otherwise unthinkable complex building, focus attention on 'key points' and make the building legible as a series of 'issues'.

Oliver makes explicit the bigger problems they are facing at the site: 'Multi layers of conservation history stacked on top of each other – where do we start? 100 years from now its' age is going to be circa 1920.' His role as heritage manger is to ensure the preservation of the monument, by insisting that intervention is kept to a minimum. He is concerned that measures to stabilise and conserve the building could entail a loss of original fabric: 'all the proper masonry will have gone'. Karen responds, conveying her sense that the difficulty of the situation shouldn't prevent anything from happening; 'I think what we're doing is maintenance in one big chunk that would have been done over the centuries. We shouldn't use the problems as an excuse not to do anything. We need to do something. It's just folly to walk away from it – more pieces are going to fall.'

We walk to the next point, looking for the stonework depicted on Karen's diagram. Karen remarks drily, 'We'll be replacing the rotten scaffold before we get to the stone.' She is joking though her point is serious: aware is she is for the need for a careful and consensual approach she is also aware of dangers and costs of delaying intervention. Later she will explain these to me in the car back to the office. Scaffolding has been up, tying up scarce funds that could more productively be used for other projects. She acknowledges that the consent process is important but is frustrated at the time it takes.

We stop and congregate, this time to consider an example of the issues relating to decaying window tracery. Most are in two parts but one is in three: the question is whether

this is 'original' or 'replacement', and if the latter whether this should later addition should be copied, or the detail inferred from earlier examples? There is also a question of how much should be replaced. Conservation guidelines dictate an approach of 'minimum intervention', but the term entails a contradiction that allows for different possible interpretations. Abstractly, architects often advocate for a higher degree of intervention that archaeologists are comfortable with: at issue, in part, are different senses of 'originality' as a matter of form and fabric respectively (Jones and Yarrow, 2013). However in practice how these disciplinary approaches play out, is held to be a matter of contextual assessment. Oliver suggests that technical advice will be needed to ascertain how much is likely to go and how quickly. As is common in these meetings, indeterminacies and un-knowns are factored out and carried forward as a series of 'action points' aimed at resolution. Aiming at agreement, irresolution and disagreement is displaced beyond the immediate confines of the space and time in which the meeting takes place.

The final point relates to the issue of 'bossing'. Stuart, the works manager, explains that in places stone has been hollowed out by water penetration, leaving the appearance of a sound ashlar which is in reality structurally compromised. Karen describes the process she and Stuart have jointly been through, tapping the individual stones and listening to the sound as a measure of material integrity. They had tried a coin but found a bulldog clip to be the most successful, making a 'good resounding noise.' Oliver consents to this approach. Agreement is noted by Karen, and the meeting concludes with a walk back to the cars.

During site meetings, people engage on the basis of roles and of expertise, which though personally embodied are not, as participants see it 'personal'. These differences of expertise and role can be imagined as complementary elements, as partial and distinct 'perspectives' that add up to a totalising vision. However they also engender tensions, expressed through joking and banter, and less frequently through more pointed disagreement.

As the heritage manager leaves a site meeting, the district architect remarks in a stage whisper to the district works manager 'Right, now we can get on with the real work!' From the perspective of heritage management, the orientations of district architects and works squads are parodied through stereotypes of pragmatism. More or less explicitly, such banter enacts an ironic distance between the personal and professional dimensions of these relationships: professional disagreements frequently emerge alongside good working relationships.

Site meetings are the means by which these professional differences are simultaneously expressed and resolved. At issue is the need for consistency that responds to and aligns difference along two key planes: Intervention must be consistent with the conservation principles of the agency (Historic Scotland), while also responding to the context of the site. Emphasizing the central importance of the context of a site, Susan highlights the limits to institutional abstractions claiming that 'there's never one answer':

You can't write a book that says every time you point it will look like this and you'll do this and this – there's twenty versions of that [...] It depends on the stone, it depends on the location, it depends how much of the building is left, it depends on the skill of the people doing it.

In various ways, site meetings occupy and resolve forms of indeterminacy that arise in the disjunction between policy and site, and from the overlapping but distinct forms of expertise that are assembled in relation to it. Through site meetings perspectives align and bifurcate, not simply as discursively expressed opinion, but as emergent artefacts of the relationships that develop as the skilled visions of experts as they perform and are performed by the material contexts they encounter. From various perspectives their emphasis on the 'feel' that can only be ascertained through direct engagement with a building, highlights how their perspectives are materially 'enacted' (Mol, 2002) as much as they are pre-figured

through these meetings. At times difference takes the form of complementarity. Karen, unaware of the precise nature of the consent process, asks Oliver to clarify, just as her acknowledged ignorance of the practicalities of stone working are compensated for by the presence of a mason. Heritage managers have oversight of the consent process, but often lack a detailed understanding of the historic context and significance of specific monuments. At other times the delimitation of role and expertise is itself at issue, in divergent assessments of what should happen. Differences of perspective associated with distinct roles and associated forms of expertise, do not always neatly resolve.

While the physical specificities of buildings present particularities that are in one sense a problem, buildings and monuments are understood to exert themselves on the decisions that are made in relation to them. In this sense, it is not simply that meetings ‘conjure’ (Abrams this volume) the building as a specific kind of context, but that the building itself helps to conjure the meeting. Physical presence is understood to facilitate resolution, insofar as problems are more tangible and easy to grasp. Graham, the District Architect responsible for Glasgow Cathedral, argues that no matter how much paperwork is produced, ‘the building needs to be there with its own voice and views, and that adds to the decision-making process immensely.’ If too much is formalized and codified, the building’s ‘voice’ becomes lost. Going ‘too deep with the paper’ negates the ‘bit-by-bit process’ of conservation: ‘Each stone, never mind each part of the building, needs a different thought process because it’s literally bit by bit by bit, literally like building up a big painting with lots of dots and so you can’t do it all on paper.’

Office Meeting

Site meetings, exemplify how, as organisational devices, meetings refract a series of positions and perspectives that emerge through the dynamic interplay of people and place. In this second section I explore how buildings constitute and are constituted in relation to a different kind of meeting located away from the sites that are their focus. Buildings encountered through site meetings present a concrete complexity that experts manage through various forms of simplification, making elements of this selectively available, through situated encounters framed by various forms of plan and document, and as ‘issues’ that unfold as a journey through the space. By contrast, in relation to the listing meeting examined in this section, heritage experts aim to understanding the ‘feel’ and ‘character’ of buildings at a remove. While buildings are similarly understood to participate as agents in the decisions made about them, listings meetings therefore involve heritage experts in qualitatively different articulations of people and place.

In a room in the headquarters of Historic Scotland, the listing team congregate for their weekly meeting. The team is responsible for the process by which historic buildings are assigned status as of designated historic significance under a process of ‘listing’ that provides varying levels of statutory protection. Members of the team file in clutching hot drinks and piles of paper. Pleasantries are exchanged—personal chat and institutional gossip. Without command the talk dies down and a tone of formality gradually settles. Though nothing has been said, it is obvious that we are ‘in’ the meeting. Faces look suddenly serious, attentive, eyes and words connecting, oriented by the agenda that all have before them, by the circular composition of chairs around a table, and by unstated conventions of discursive turn taking. Chaired by the team leader in an affable but business-like manner, there are a series of updates and news items before presentation of the listings cases commences. For each building there is a short presentation given by the listings officer overseeing the case. Today a range of buildings are being considered including a Victorian hospital, a brutalist 1960s

school and a range of domestic houses. Some of these are already 'listed' and are being considered for 'de-listing', normally in response to requests from owners. In other cases the question is whether to list an un-listed building, or to up-grade an existing designation. Sitting at the head of the long table around which all are congregated, images of the case are projected on a screen, to a running commentary of the key points and issues. The tone is informal, descriptions of the buildings mixed with jokes and asides relating to the site visits, but unspoken conventions are implicitly at work. Presentations begin with contextual information on the architect, period of construction and background to the case. Photographic images of key external facades are presented before moving to internal photographs of significant architectural features. Site visits to buildings are normally undertaken alone and provide listings officers with an empirical understanding of buildings, which they bring to their presentations. A sense of the space is conveyed through movement back and forwards between pictures and plans.

The meeting room has a sanitised institutional feel that strikingly contrasts with the qualities of the historic buildings the team have gathered to discuss. As a 'non-place' (Auge, 2009) it engenders a globally recognisable office aesthetic that seems to deliberately erase spatial specificity. These qualities of placelessness, act to direct attention beyond the immediate locale of the meeting, and to amplify the 'character' – the term is repeatedly used – of the different buildings the team have gathered to consider. Seeking to understand these buildings at a remove, the spatial and material qualities of meeting rooms are incidental to a gaze that is directed beyond these to the specific character of 'the building itself'. Listings meetings thus conjure a 'third space' (Soja, 1996), as a set of imaginative architectural possibilities made available by an intricate interweaving of texts, images and spoken words that direct attention beyond the immediate locale of the meeting.

In this, as in other meetings, a diverse range of building periods and styles are under consideration. A 1960s modernist school quickly produces consensus. Feedback from the twentieth century society, consulted to provide opinion on significance, has produced a 'not very enthusiastic response.' Amongst those gathered there is general enthusiasm for the building as a piece of design, but acknowledgement it fails to meet the listing criteria; it is not sufficiently 'architecturally significant'. Elly brings this brief, consensual discussion to conclusion: 'It's interesting but very difficult to justify'. Another listing officer presents the case of a Victorian police box. It is already listed but renovation work is being proposed on some adjacent steps and the council want it moved. The council are proposing de-listing the building in order to allow this, and arguing that it does not meet the listing criteria. Elly, head of listings, is keen to keep the structure. Though it clearly meets the listing criteria, she is happy for it to be moved. Listing relates to the location, not simply the structure. There is consensus regarding what should happen, but uncertainty as to how this can be achieved within the legislative framework. Discussion focuses on whether and how this will be bureaucratically accommodated.

During presentations, a collective understanding of these spaces is evoked through the subtle interplay between images and spoken words. Images elicit qualitative descriptions of the experience and feel of the building, and are the cue for presenter to provide further context and description of elements of the structure not well conveyed visually. By the same token images of photographs and plans are invoked where verbal descriptions reach their limits: it is held that much of what is important in these buildings can only be appreciated by seeing it. In the absence of the building itself, listing officers attempt to convey this 'experience'. Conversation interweaves a technical descriptive language of space and aesthetics, with the evaluative concerns of conservation legislation. There is talk of the architectonics of spaces, of the narrative of buildings and of their visual grammar, of levels of

‘intactness’ and ‘integrity’ and of the extent to which structures are of broader ‘historic importance’ and ‘significance’.

As in the case of site meetings, listings meetings constitute the buildings as central and significant elements of the decisions that are made in relation to them. While an understanding of the building is a necessary first step, decisions about listing require that these empirical specificities be linked to a set of formal criteria. In order to determine whether and at what level a building is listed, it is assessed in relation to a range of factors, namely, 1) age and rarity, 2) architectural and historic interest and 3) ‘close historical association’ – for example through a relationship between a building and an important person or event. The listing process is regarded as ‘objective’ in a number of linked senses. These configure understandings of the procedure and conduct appropriate in meetings, and constitute the very rationale for meeting.

For members of the listing team, being objective is partly a matter of the consistent application of the three formal criteria outlined above. While these are formally clear, they recognise that the relation between abstractly specified formal criteria and the concrete specificity of particular buildings is necessarily interpretive. Empirical understanding of buildings is always the starting point for interpretation but cannot of itself determine significance. Moreover since the importance of a building relates to a ‘character’ that inheres in its contextual specificity, assessments are never straightforwardly procedural. Meetings are central to this process, as a way ensuring a consistency of interpretation that gives the process an imagined quality of ‘objectivity’.

While the relationship between building and criteria requires ‘judgment’, this is predicated upon certain understandings of the kind of person required to make this. ‘Personal’ responses are irrelevant to these considerations, the only issue being how the building’s

measure up to the listings criteria. Subjective assessments emerge in the interstices of the process in irreverent and ironically un-self-censured remarks and asides – An interesting Victorian hospital is presented to round approval: ‘Ooh, that’s really nice!’ ‘Wow, what a great building!’ ‘I really like that’. The case of a listed building with un-consented work receives a less enthusiastic assessment: ‘Oh yes, it’s dreadful!’ Personal, subjective responses are deliberately overplayed in ways that simultaneously acknowledge their existence and mark them as extrinsic to the process. At various points the team leader makes explicit for our benefit the otherwise un-stated but crucially important point: ‘it’s not about whether we like it or not.’ During an interview Joan, a listings officer, makes explicit how this engenders the important distinction between personal opinion and an academically grounded appreciation of what is historically important: ‘There has to be an intellectual basis...Something like a concrete block could actually be incredibly important. It’s not necessarily beautiful. Not all listed buildings are beautiful country houses or cute thatched cottages.’ While the meeting brings together various relevant people, their participation is predicated on this axiomatic distinction: participating as embodiments of expert knowledge and engendering specific roles, other more ‘personal’ judgments are suspended and factored out. They may be expressed, but go unrecorded and are not recognised as legitimate considerations in the decision-making process.

While the professional judgment of those present often converges in tacit agreement, these relate to differences of perspective that can also be a source of conflict and debate. Unlike ‘personal’ differences, these professional differences are important. Robust decision-making requires that these are considered and aligned through a process of discussion and debate. As in the context of site meetings, buildings are understood to have an empirical objectivity and hence independence, that ultimately mediates and grounds these differences. At various points during the presentations differences of opinion emerge as to the relative

interest of building's 'character' and 'historic significance' – central criteria for the evaluation of buildings. Conversation amplifies these differences of perspective with the ultimate aim of aligning them. The rhetorical mechanisms by which this occurs are subtle: additional perspectives are elicited from others in the team until consensus is achieved; further contexts are evoked for example by reference to other cases or previously undisclosed details of the building. The meeting is determined by egalitarian and consensual principles of decision making but relative to any given case, there is tacit acknowledgement of a hierarchy of expertise. Management of these perspectives is orchestrated by the team leader, who brings in people where particular forms of expertise seem required. Questions from the team leader are directed at moving the process on through consideration of comparative examples, experience and various forms of evidence: 'Do you know if there are any other surviving examples from this period?'; 'Have you seen anything of this quality before?' In most cases consensus settles easily as a collectively shared interpretation of how building and listing criteria relate. Where this seems in doubt the team leader interjects: sometimes to make her own judgment but more often to make explicit where consensus seems to lie. Sometimes differences of interpretation or uncertainties about the building make a decision impossible. Minutes record actions, for example further research or additional site visits, in anticipation of re-consideration at subsequent meetings.

Through this and other listings meetings the objectivity is less a determining principle than a regulatory ideal (Daston and Galison, 2007). Because it is not given, it has to be achieved. While the process pre-supposes and even requires that differences of perspective will legitimately emerge, it also allows for their negotiation and resolution. In an interview with Elly, head of the listings team, she makes this explicit:

We're very much about making a collegiate decision so there's never one person says, 'Oh, that should be listed, and they go off and list it'. It's very much the

whole team taking part. We've got different knowledge and expertise but also [it's important to] get away from the [public] idea that, 'Oh, it's someone sitting in Edinburgh, it was their whim, that's why it got listed.' So it's absolutely...every single case will be looked at, and the decision made by the whole team.'

Laurence explains that meetings are particularly important where a decision is unclear or where there may be initial disagreement:

If you're not certain, it needs to be re-thought through and that's why the decision is never made at one meeting unless it's obvious. Sometimes you can have up to ten meetings on the same building, because it's complex. That's why the meetings are important. You end up at a situation where, 'Ah, now we can take this forwards.' Whereas before you weren't. That kind of galvanises at the meeting.

A complex building makes for a complex decision. Knowledge required to understand the building and to relate it to the listing criteria expands beyond that of any given expert. Where a multiplicity of people and specialism are required, meetings proliferate to explore and respond to this complexity. Attributed a singular character of their own, buildings are understood as an ultimate arbiters of the perspectives that can proliferate in relation to them. Members of the listing team frequently make this point explicit: 'It's either listable or its not'. Insofar as the building is objective, empirical understanding draws together what is initially separate: opinions derived from different forms of expertise coalesce as this objectivity is established.

On occasion individual members of the team can feel aggrieved where their own perspective is overlooked, or marginalised. Consistency entails compromise that can feel personally frustrating. However meetings are also understood in more intellectually expansive terms. Laurence makes this idea explicit in the image of the team brought together

in meetings as a kind of ‘collective brain’: ‘Individually you may not know but normally consensus emerges through discussion.’ The metaphor of the brain makes evident how the ideas articulated in meetings exceed the sum of the individually held ‘roles’ or ‘perspectives’, in collective understandings that are more than the sum of their parts. Meetings are thus moments of revelation as much as conflict, and are constitutive of knowledge at the interstices of people a perspective and place.

In the listings team as in other parts of the organisation, meetings facilitate the achievement of consistency through aligning different kinds of knowledge, understanding and experience. By contrast to site meetings where the building is physically present, these office-based meetings constitute buildings as a kind of absent presence through the performance of words, images and office infrastructures that are imagined as incidental to the character they seek to convey. While this orients a qualitatively different form of meeting, it entails an ultimately similar orientation to buildings as key actors that simultaneously generate and arbitrate the perspectives and knowledge that meetings assemble. Listings meetings, like site meetings, perform historic buildings and set in train a series of dynamics that are performed by them.

Conclusion: Meeting Place

Ethnography of meeting highlights a series of dynamics that have received relatively little attention in interdisciplinary accounts of heritage practice. The recent burgeoning of the field of critical heritage studies has done much to illuminate the ‘consumption’ of heritage via various practices of reinterpretation, appropriation and resistance to professional presentations of the past, but has had much less to say about the practices through which these understandings are constituted through various heritage experts (Brumann, 2014, Jones and Yarrow, 2013). While the paper’s focus on heritage experts helps to redress this

imbalance, the lens of ‘meeting’ highlights a specific set of negotiations that complicate and refine understanding of the work of these professionals. In a range of heritage contexts, objectivity has been seen as central to an ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (Smith, 2006) that supports elite interests and excludes subaltern perspectives. While such approaches usefully foreground the political dimensions to epistemic forms integral to conservation, the focus on discourses, and the related use of methodologies that focus on institutionally authored texts, leads to an overly monolithic portrayal that does little to illuminate the specific contexts in which these ideals emerge.

Focusing on meetings I have shown how linked ideas about the need for consistency and objectivity frames the work of heritage professionals not as a singular logic, but as set off emergent and situated practices (Daston and Galison, 2007). For heritage professionals, meetings are organisational devices that help to deal with various forms of contingency, uncertainty and irresolution. Meetings, in other words, involve a series of situated practices that are not organised, but organising (Mosse, 2005, Mol, 2002). As spaces for the resolution of various forms of indeterminacy they produce outcomes which, while in one sense never entirely surprising are neither pre-determined nor wholly predictable. From the perspective of those involved, this is not only because heritage conservation requires situated accommodations between different, more or less contradictory forms of expertise, but also because the question of how these come together is always also in relation to the contextually specific material circumstances of specific monuments and buildings. While various kinds of document are central to these negotiations the lens of meeting, highlights a series of dynamics that are structured but not determined by these textual artefacts. Analyses of heritage have often used the textual accounts of heritage experts as proxies for their practice. As a consequence they have tended to overlook the complexities that inhere in a range of practices that exceed and complicate organisation’s own accounts of what they do. A focus

on meetings therefore sheds new light on the dynamics through which historic built environments are created and reproduced at the intersection of various forms of knowledge and practice.

This ethnographic lens also highlights a range of dynamics that have received relatively little ethnographic attention in wider discussions of bureaucracy, where discursive analyses have often acted to reproduce assumptions about bureaucratic and institutional conduct as immaterial and placeless (Hull, 2012). At Historic Scotland, meetings are devices for assembling and negotiating perspectives. I have suggested that through these people constitute place in relation to specific interests in built environments. By the same token, I have highlighted how, from the perspective of those involved, historic buildings and monuments participate in the process of meeting, extending and directing the knowledge of those who meet. In the context of meeting, the ‘perspectives’ of heritage experts assemble the world as much as they are assembled by it. What is known through meeting cannot be separated from where and in what circumstances it is known. Insofar as the negotiation of personal and institutional differences of perspective are indissoluble from consideration of these spatial and material circumstances, it follows that the process of meeting is not simply ‘social’. In the meetings at the heart of this paper, people, artefacts, materials and tools are brought into relation, in ways that simultaneously respond to and produce the ‘objectivity’ of the buildings that are at the heart of these processes. While the dynamics of meeting described therefore highlight the limitations of analyses premised on the distinction of social and material domains, these also complicate assumptions about corporeally bounded individual subjectivity as the *sine qua non* of institutional practice.

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